

WORLD/NATION BRIEFS

Astronauts test 'Star Wars' gear

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — Discovery's astronauts aimed a "Star Wars" research satellite at rocket fuel spewed in space Thursday as the shuttle, satellite and fuel canister zipped around the world in formation.

Groups rally for, against bill

WASHINGTON — A leading Hispanic rights group says it will support a free-trade agreement with Mexico, but a coalition of consumer, farm and labor organizations rallied Thursday to denounce negotiations to lift trade barriers along the Rio Grande.

While the Economic Policy Institute said a free trade agreement with Mexico could cause massive losses of high-paying U.S. jobs, the National Council of La Raza said it believes the accord could result in better jobs for both countries.

Bodies surface after cyclone

DHAKA, Bangladesh — The bodies of thousands of victims killed in a devastating cyclone washed up Thursday on the shores of Bangladesh, as the government struggled to provide relief to millions of survivors.

The official death toll for Tuesday's cyclone, the most powerful to hit this impoverished nation, is 37,543. But thousands are missing on islands and coastal deltas. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia estimated at least 100,000 people were killed.

Police jail, charge man in poisoning of colleague

CONROE (AP) — A University of Texas scientist remained jailed Thursday, accused of trying to kill a colleague by tainting his nose spray with a cancer-causing poison.

John Gunnar Linner, 47, a cell biologist at Cryobiology Research Center in The Woodlands north of Houston, has been charged with attempted murder and is being held without bond at the Montgomery County Jail. He was arrested at his home shortly before midnight Tuesday.

Wallace Barry Van Winkle, 46, Linner's co-worker, told police he had a "terrible burning reaction" about two weeks ago after using Afrin Nasal Spray. The scientist had the spray analyzed and found it was contaminated with a potentially lethal dose of beta-Propiolactone, police said.

The colorless liquid is used as a chemical intermediate in the synthesis of acrylate plastics, as a vapor sterilant and as a disinfectant.

Authorities believe Linner, a scientist credited with revolutionizing biological tissue research, may have planned the incident because he was angered about losing his job.

"All I can tell you at this point is that he is not guilty of any offense," Linner's attorney, Robert Bennett of Houston, said.

Montgomery County District Attorney Peter Speers said another bond hearing for Linner may be held Friday. State District Judge James Keeshan initially denied bond.

Linner was director of the lab at The Woodlands, about 25 miles north of Houston and affiliated with the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston. He and Van Winkle were involved in research related to the preparation and preservation of biological tissue.

Linner had been notified his research contract would not be renewed after Aug. 31. But Van Winkle was to be transferred to the medical school's pathology department in Houston.

UT Health Science Center spokeswoman Ina Fried said the research office was shut down permanently Wednesday, seven months earlier than planned.

Report shows no contamination

Explosion kills eight

STERLINGTON, La. (AP) — Eight employees died in the fertilizer plant explosion that also injured more than 100 others, a company official said Thursday. Between 500 to 600 evacuees began returning to their homes Thursday night.

The bodies of all eight workers — seven men and one woman — were recovered from the site of Wednesday's explosion and fires, said Bill Patterson, operations manager of the IMC Fertilizer plant. Among the dead was the plant's manager.

The explosion occurred about 1:30 p.m. CDT Wednesday and it wasn't until 24 hours later that firefighters were able to extinguish the last of the small fires that were still burning.

City officials finally signaled the all-clear and began letting residents return at 7:30 p.m. Thursday.

Only people with drivers' licenses or similar identification were allowed past roadblocks, said Police Chief Walter Kemper. Sightseers and the curious were being turned away, Kemper said.

Highways on both sides of the town began backing up with traffic in anticipation of a state Department of Environmental Quality report that showed no serious contamination, Kemper said.

State environmental officials also were checking for pollution or chemical contamination at the plant, Sterlington's largest employer with between 400 to 450 workers.

Patterson said damage assessment experts had been hired by the company, Sterlington's largest employer, to investigate the cause of the explosion and amount of damage.

Between 500 and 600 of the town's estimated 1,200 people were evacuated immediately after the blast, emptying the community. Other residents had left earlier because of floods that followed heavy weekend rain.

Although the state police evacuation order remained in effect Thursday afternoon, a few business owners were allowed back into town to assess damage.

Pope calls for social justice

John Paul II pronounces new world vision in ninth encyclical

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope John Paul II on Thursday spelled out his vision of a post-Communist world of economic and social justice, leaving room for capitalism — with a moral core — but no place for "consumer societies."



Pope John Paul II, asks if capitalism should be the goal for Eastern Europe.

His views were presented in his ninth encyclical, the Roman Catholic church's first major pronouncement of social doctrine since the fall of East bloc Communist governments.

"Western countries ... run the risk of seeing this collapse as a one-sided victory of their own

economic system, and thereby failing to make necessary corrections in that system," John Paul said.

The views should be especially applied in Eastern Europe, which is "experiencing a serious lack of direction in the work of rebuilding," said the Polish-born pontiff.

Church-linked and labor groups in the United States and Europe hailed the document for its emphasis on social justice and workers' rights. Conservative groups rejoiced in what they called the Vatican's most forthright endorsement of the free market in a century.

John Paul acknowledged capitalism's successes but denounced the system for sometimes achieving them at the

expense of the poor and of morality.

John Paul asked rhetorically if capitalism should be the goal of Eastern Europe as well as a model for Third World countries "searching for the path to true economic and civil progress."

"The answer is obviously complex," the pope wrote, saying capitalism could only be acceptable if it had an ethical and religious core.

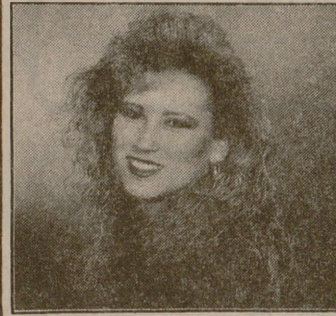
"It is unacceptable to say" that capitalism is now "the only model of economic organization," he said. "It is necessary to break down the barriers and monopolies which leave so many countries on the margins of development, and to provide all individuals and nations with the basic conditions which will enable them to share in development."

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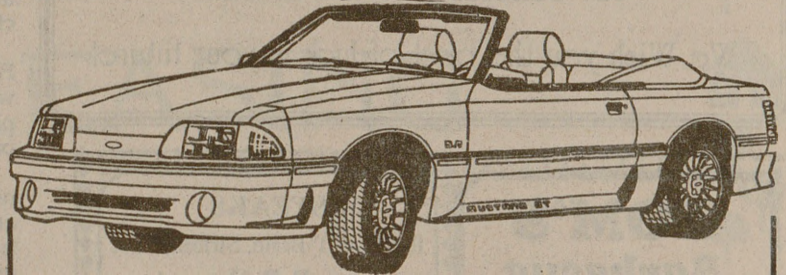
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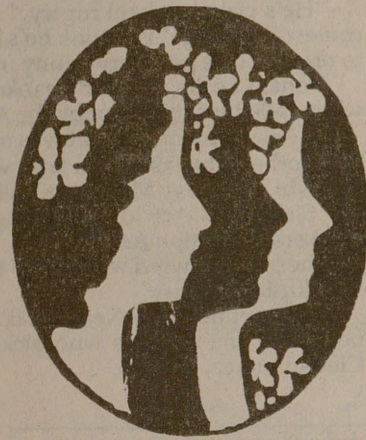
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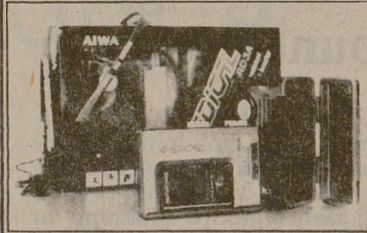
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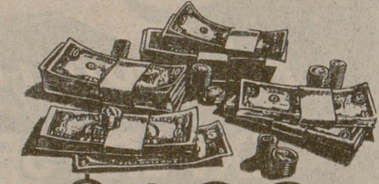
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